

[Love \(n.\)](#) by [orphan_account](#)

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Characters: Eleven | Jane Hopper, Jim "Chief" Hopper, Mike Wheeler, Nancy Wheeler

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Summary:

El finally asks what love means.

Love (n.)

El enjoyed watching her soap operas. She would watch them almost every evening while she waited for Hopper to return home from work. She enjoyed the drama, but the plots involving romance were always her favourites.

On one particular evening, Hopper did not have to work. So, El somehow convinced him to sit and watch an episode with her.

"Alright, fine," he had said, finally obliging, "but don't pick anything too cheesy."

As if that were possible.

He took a seat next to her on the sofa as she eagerly turned on the television and found the right channel. When the episode started, she sat leaning forward, her legs crossed, and her chin resting in her hands. Her eyes stared directly at the screen in front of her. Hopper noticed her position and examined her face for a moment. He wasn't sure if he had seen her blink since the start of the episode.

To Hopper, the show went on forever. He had trouble keeping his attention focused on the plot, so he had no idea what was going on. He wasn't really hearing any of the words coming from the television, but he also wasn't really listening. Instead, he leaned his head against the back of the sofa and drifted away.

El, still staring intently at the screen, noticed when two of the characters said a word that she did not understand. She had heard the word many times before - mostly between Mike and his mother - but she never really understood what it meant. She assumed it was something people said along with their goodbyes, but it was used differently on her soap operas. And in this particular scene, it was said much less nonchalant than how Mike and his mother said it.

"What does love mean?" she asked finally, waking Hopper from his light sleep.

He took a moment before he sat up and faced her.

"What?" he asked, delaying his answer. He hadn't been too keen on the subject since his daughter's passing.

"The man on the television told the woman that he loved her," El explained. "What does that mean?"

He cleared his throat and wiped the sweat from his forehead, still not wanting to speak. But he knew it would be wrong not to answer her.

"Love is an emotion, like when you feel happy," he began. "But it is a strong emotion that might describe how you feel about someone." He paused to think of an example. "Most parents love their children, meaning that they always have the thought of them in the back of their mind, and they would do anything to make sure they are happy and safe."

"Do children love their parents?" she asked.

"Yes, because they know their parents will always be there for them when they need," he answered. "But you might also love your friends. When you do, it's usually because you know they are genuine, and you enjoy hanging out with them. Friends always have a good time together."

"Friends don't lie," she said.

"Right, I had that one coming," he said to himself.

For a moment, he seemed like he had more to say, but he instead ended his explanation with "anyway, that's what love is" and headed off to bed. He didn't want to explain any more to her because he didn't want her running off to the Wheeler boy and professing her love to him.

But the next morning, she ran off to him anyway - although not to profess her love.

She knew there was more that Hopper wasn't telling her. She knew that the man on the television wasn't the woman's parent. She also knew that they weren't just friends either, thanks to one incident with Max.

"Stop calling Mike your friend," El had said. "He's my friend!"

"No, he's your boyfriend!" Max had said in response.

Now she stood before the door to her boyfriend's house, determined to find out what love meant.

"Hello," Nancy said, opening the door for her. "Mike is downstairs."

El followed Nancy into the basement, where Mike sat, finishing his homework.

"You've got company," Nancy said, getting his attention.

When he saw El, he quickly stashed away his homework and gestured for Nancy to leave.

"Hi, El," he said. "Is there something I can do for you?"

"What does love mean?" she asked without hesitation. Because she had been too nervous to ask for so long, she wanted to get straight to the point.

His face turned bright red.

"Oh, uh, that's an interesting question," he stammered, gesturing for her to join him on the couch. She sat next to him, making sure to have some kind of contact with him.

He thought for a moment, trying to put words together into an explanation. She didn't hesitate to ask, so he didn't want to hesitate to answer.

"Well," he began, "I suppose love is something you feel when you always want to be with someone - when you always want to make sure they are safe. Love sort of consumes you. You feel empty when you are not with the person you love, and you feel tingly and warm when you are."

"Tingly?" she asked.

"It's the feeling in your stomach you get when you are with someone

you care about a lot," he explained. "Anyway, love is the way people start to feel about each other when they are together for a long time. Like, like..."

He fell silent for a moment, trying to think of an example.

"Like how I love you," he finally said, unsure of how she was going to react.

El saw the embarrassment on his face, and reached for his hand reassuringly.

"I feel tingly," she said. "Does that mean I love you?"

She noticed that he wouldn't look at her, so she turned his face to make his eyes meet hers.

"I don't know," he replied. "Only you can know how you feel."

Her gaze fell to the floor as she thought.

"I think I do," she said finally, their hands still intertwined.

"You don't have to say it until you're sure," he said. "You just learned the word today, afterall."

She smiled slightly and fixed her eyes back onto him. It was obvious how much he cared for her, and she cared for him just as much. She knew that she loved him.

"Mike," she said, bringing his attention back to her. "I love you."

He squeezed her hand.

"You're sure?" he asked. + a

"I'm sure."